

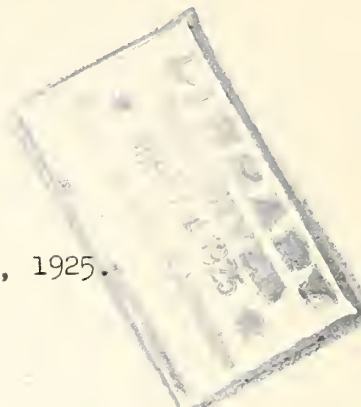
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY
Washington, D. C.

March 2, 1925.



TO THE BIRD MIGRATION OBSERVERS OF THE BIOLOGICAL SURVEY:

The voluntary assistance which for so many years has been given by the numerous bird migration observers of the Biological Survey is greatly appreciated by the Bureau. The continuance of their active cooperation is earnestly desired, both in the matter of observations and in putting into effect a change in the method of preparing the reports.

At the present time the Bureau finds itself without sufficient clerical assistance to prepare for the permanent card files the great number of bird migration records that it receives on the schedules each year.

To obviate this difficulty as much as possible it seems desirable to change the form of report and to request the observers themselves to enter their records directly on cards that can be placed in the files without the necessity of copying. This system, furthermore, will make the records available for use much sooner than has formerly been possible.

It is hoped, therefore, that all the observers will cooperate in making this change, even though it should involve a little extra work on their part. The inclosed cards have been prepared to take the place of the schedules, and are to be filled out in much the same way.

Since these cards are to be placed in the permanent files of the Biological Survey, it is desirable that they be legibly written and kept as clean as possible. They should be written in ink, not with pencil.

On the top line should be written the name of the bird. (The square in the upper left hand corner should be left blank.)

On the second line should be entered the locality where the observations were made. The post office address of the observer is sufficient for a territory within a radius of 8 to 10 miles.

On the third line should be given the name of the observer.

In the square at the end of the second and third lines should appear the year during which the records were made.

Note.- In case there are records of 20 or more species by one observer, for the same locality, and during the same year, such cards may be tied together, with the observer's name, locality, and year written on the top card only, and the remainder of the cards will be filled in by rubber stamp at this office. For records of observations made at some distance from the observer's home or principal station the full information called for on the card should be given.

Records of observations are to be placed in the spaces provided below the third line, as follows:

First space, the date when the bird was first seen.

Second space, the approximate number observed on the date first seen.

Third space, the date when the species was next seen, whether on the next day or not until some time later.

Fourth space, the date when the species became common. Some birds come in a body and are common from the first, while others straggle along and do not become common for some time, while still others never become common.

Fifth space, the last date on which the species was seen. As this means the date of departure it can be filled only when all the birds leave. There will be no last record in spring, therefore, for species that breed in the vicinity; or in fall for those that remain through the winter.

Sixth space, a notation as to whether the species is "abdt." (abundant), "com." (common), "tol. com." (tolerably common), or "rare."

Last space, "Yes" or "no," to show whether or not the species breeds in the vicinity.

Additional information, such as breeding dates, exceptional abundance or scarcity, etc., may be noted in the space at the bottom or on the back of the card.

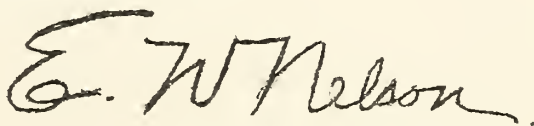
Separate cards should be used for the spring and fall migration reports. All records should be exact and noted at the time when the observations are made, not from memory at some subsequent time. General statements, such as "early in March" or "late in May" are of little value.

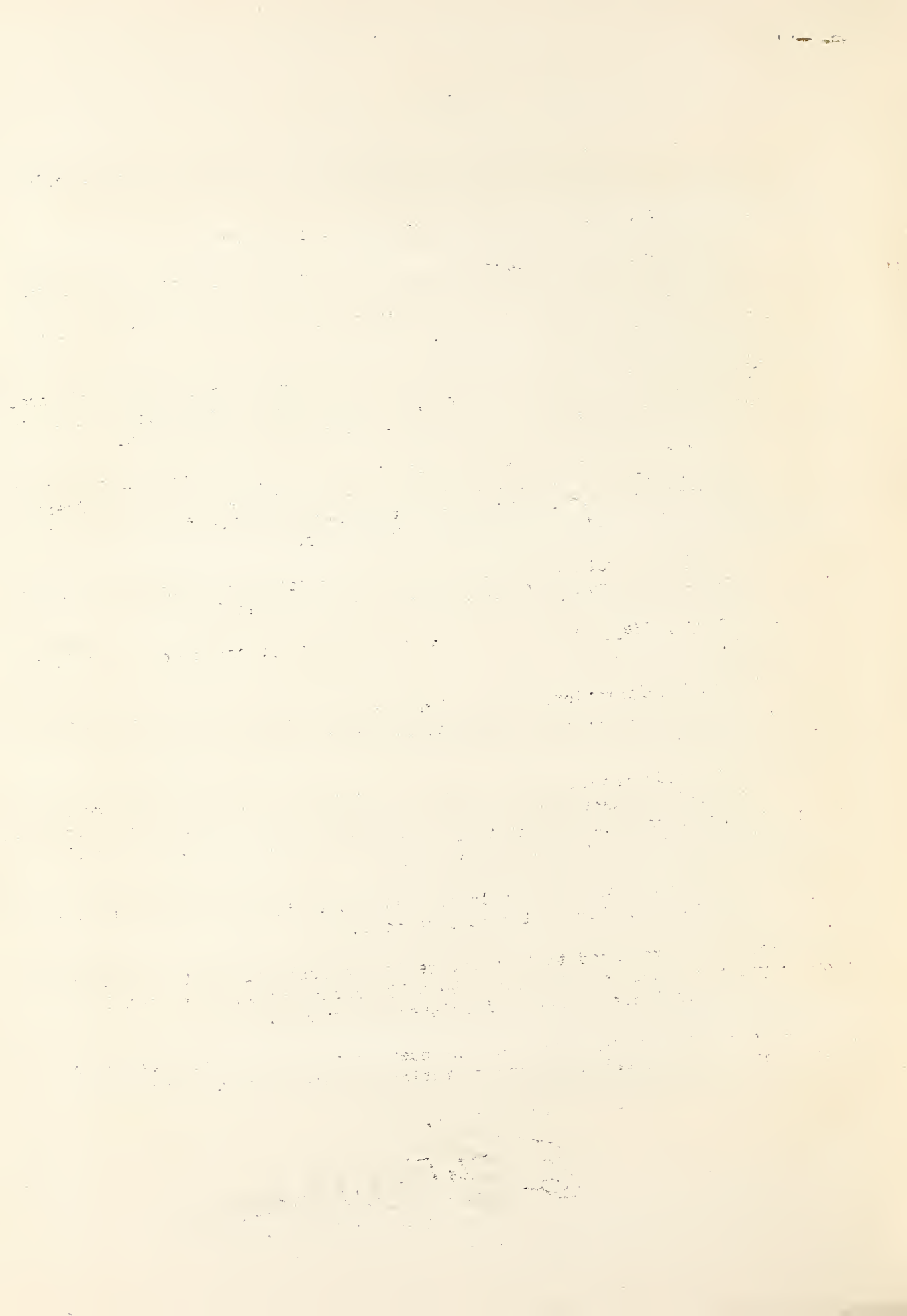
The larger card inclosed should be filled out with the observer's name and the address to which his mail should be sent.

Cards may be returned to this office in the inclosed return envelope without payment of postage. Not over about 100 cards should be placed in one envelope. Additional cards will be furnished on request.

We trust that we may have the continued cooperation of all our observers in our study of the distribution and migration of North American birds.

Very truly yours,


Chief of Bureau.



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United States Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Biological Survey

Washington, D. C.

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INSTRUCTIONS TO BIRD MIGRATION OBSERVERS

Prepared by Frederick C. Lincoln, In Charge, Section of Distribution
and Migration of Birds, Division of Wildlife Research

The study of the distribution and migration of North American birds ranks among the oldest lines of research conducted by the Biological Survey. In 1885 the investigations were taken over from the original migration committee of the American Ornithologists' Union when the Division that later became the Bureau was established. Since that time the accumulation of information on the subject has been continuous and along two lines: (1) Original observations by the Survey's own staff and a corps of volunteer co-operators; (2) abstracting of contemporary literature. The resulting data are recorded chiefly on cards, 2-by-5 inch, which are filed by species (in the order of the 1910 A.O.U. Check-list). The species groups are further broken down by State and other political divisions, in a north and south arrangement that agrees in a general way with the four major flyways--the Atlantic, the Mississippi, the Central, and the Pacific.

During the more than 50 years that this work has been in progress, interest in bird life has steadily increased, until today there are literally thousands of students of birds in all parts of the country. Every State has at least one bird club or Audubon Society, and there are four major societies with continental or world-wide membership devoted to the science of ornithology.

From the memberships of these societies the Survey might enroll hundreds if not thousands of migration observers, but for obvious reasons it is no longer necessary to have a large corps of co-operators or to prepare literature-citation cards every time the name of a bird appears in print. It has therefore become possible for the Survey to "pick and choose" among those interested. In doing so, however, it desires to retain the services of a carefully selected force of observers, strategically located along the various migration routes that make up the different flyways. The Bureau greatly appreciates the services of its bird-observation co-operators; at the same time it trusts that they will understand the confidence placed in them and recognize their responsibility. Not every offer of cooperation is accepted.

If the data gathered by the varied force from all parts of the continent are to be of the maximum practical value, standardization of recording methods is essential. The following instructions, for the guidance of all concerned, are designed to that end.

Making the Observations

Notes on the migrations of birds are made by the serious student at every opportunity. The first or last occurrence of a bird during a migration season may be noted in the yard of the observer, or while en route to or from the scene of his daily occupation, or on a special week-end, holiday, or Sunday "bird trip" to favored haunts. A pair of good field glasses (not above 8 power), with notebook and pencil is part of his regular equipment.

Accuracy in identification.—The random note of today may become the science of tomorrow. Accuracy, therefore, is first importance. There is no reason for a bird observer to identify every bird he sees, so if he cannot be absolutely positive he should just forget the incident. Guesses have no place in the scientific notebook.

Every observer should have a general knowledge of the bird list of his section of the country and should exercise the greatest care in making additions to it. Ordinarily, a bird new to a State list should be recorded only upon the basis of a preserved specimen. For smaller sections such collecting is not always necessary, but the rare birds should always be placed on record only after the utmost pains have been taken to eliminate every possibility of error. Many a professional and well-trained naturalist has seen birds that he identified visually as a species rare or even new to the area, but which, upon collection, proved to be of a species locally common. If, after careful study, the identity of a rarity is confirmed, careful note should be made (in the field at the time) of the characters or mannerisms that aided in the decision.

Use of names.—It is not necessary for the migration observer either to know or to use the scientific, or technical, names of birds but he should know and use the accepted common name. A standard handbook or (if such exists) the published list of the birds of his State, is almost as important an item in his equipment as are his field glasses. The Survey will always be glad to give advice on helpful books available for the purpose.

Though desirable, it is not necessary to use the qualifying adjective when referring to a species that may have several geographic races, or subspecies. For example, a robin is a robin, whether it is the eastern, north-western, San Lucas, southern, or western form. In some cases, however, the full name should be given with meticulous care. An example of this is the bluebird, which in eastern North America can mean only the "eastern bluebird" (*Sialia sialis sialis*), but for an observer in Colorado to record merely "bluebird" at once raises the question whether is meant the eastern bird, which does occur west to the Rocky Mountains; the mountain blue bird (*Sialia currucoides*), which is the most common species in that State; or the chestnut-backed bluebird (*Sialia mexicana bairdi*), which is found in the mountainous parts. Similarly, loose use of such group names as "wren", "oriole", or "blackbird" renders a record worthless; such records can only be "filed" in the waste basket.

This demonstrates another reason for having at hand an up-to-date and comprehensive book on the subject. The little pocket guides serve a

useful purpose, particularly for juvenile students, but the mature observer whose notes are worthy of permanent record in the Survey's files should be better equipped.

Recording the Observations

Every student of birds will sooner or later work out the system of note taking and recording that best meets his own requirements. The Survey does not wish to prescribe any particular system to be followed by co-operators any more than it does for the naturalists on its own staff. Nevertheless, it is essential that reports prepared for the permanent files follow a standard procedure, and this applies both to the members of the scientific staff and to the volunteer observers. For use in preparing reports on the migration of birds, the 2-by-5 cards (Form Bi-801), are supplied to all migration observers.

Name of bird		Wood Thrush				
Locality		Washington, D. C.				Year
Observer		John Doe.				1936
First seen	Number seen	Next seen	Became common	Last seen	Breeds	Winters
April 21	2	April 23	April 30		Com.	No.
Bird seen building May 5. Young seen out of nest June 10.						
Form Bi-801						
GPO 8-5280						

Preparing report cards.---Since the "Bird Migration Observation" cards are to be incorporated in the permanent files, it is essential that all entries be legibly written or stamped in ink. Some observers use the typewriter, and while this makes neat-looking cards, it is not a requirement. Lead pencil should not be used.

Essential data.---The name of the bird should be entered on the top line. (See above for comments regarding names.) The square in the upper left corner should be left blank.

The locality where the observations were made should be entered on the second line. The post office address (town and State) of the observer is sufficient in covering an area having a radius of 8 to 10 miles.

The name of the observer should be entered on the third line. Many observers use rubber stamps for their names and addresses, thus saving a great deal of time in preparing the cards. Such stamps are inexpensive and with a little care will last indefinitely.

The year in which observations are made should be entered in the square at the end of the second and third lines.

The data to be entered in the spaces below the third line are: (1) Date the species was first seen; (2) the approximate number noted on the first observation; (3) date the species was next seen, whether on the next day or not until some time later; (4) date the species became common; (5) date the species was last seen; (6 and 7) the appropriate abbreviation as "abdt." (abundant), "plen." (plentiful), "com." (common), or "rare" to indicate status as a breeding or wintering species. If it does not breed or winter enter the word "no" in either or both spaces as the case may require.

Use of terms.--Care should be exercised in using the relative terms "abundant", "plentiful", etc., as a certain number of individuals of one species seen during one day might represent unusual abundance for that species, whereas the same number of another species would indicate scarcity. A dozen duck hawks seen in one day would represent abundance, but the same number of juncos would, in most sections, represent scarcity.

Dates.--Observers should not list a "date first seen" that obviously is unusually late, unless explanatory comment is added. In some seasons, for one reason or another, all migration may be exceptionally early or late. Also, the permanent residents of any particular locality should not be listed year after year on migration cards. New observers should list these once, writing "permanent resident" across the spaces below line 3, and indicating at the bottom of the cards, the status of these species (abundant, common, etc.) in that locality.

Not all birds perform their migrations alike. Some straggle along in small numbers and may never appear plentiful or abundant in any one place. Others seem to have scouts, or an advance guard, which may arrive several days before the main body. Still others arrive en masse, and are noted in numbers from the date of first observation. Date of departure can be recorded for the last day seen only when all birds of the particular species leave. Consequently, in spring, for migrants that breed in the area of observation, there can be no "date last seen". Similarly, in fall there can be no last date if the species remains through the winter.

Such additional information as actual breeding dates, unusual occurrence in winter, or unusual abundance or scarcity should be noted in the space at the bottom of the card or on the back. If the back is used at all, note "over" on the front.

Mailing reports.--Separate sets of cards should be used for the spring and fall migration and as promptly as possible after the close of the migration period they should be sent to the Bureau in the franked return envelopes provided. It is not well to mail more than 100 cards in an envelope for fear of damage or loss.

The 3-by-5 card provided should be filled in with the observer's name and full mailing address, so that mail and printed matter will be promptly delivered.